

Benj. Kopman



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KOPMAN

BY

DAVID IGNATOFF



E.WEYHE-NEWYORK

1930





WHEN man first began to see a tree, a mountain, an animal not just because he stood in front of the tree, the mountain or the animal, but because for reasons unknown to him, these objects emerged before his eyes—the story of art began—the story of that eternal light that has risen like a halo over man.

What are we and what would we be without this light!

In the prehistoric days when man only knew how to find his food, a place to sleep, sexual satisfaction and even how to care for his offspring, man was still animal. Only when man suddenly began to see what other animals did not see—did new horizons appear. A new weapon was acquired and came to his rescue.

In his apocalyptic state, man saw creatures and things that were only partly based on reality. So, for instance, in the form of a snake, man in his ecstasy to create new visions began to see the dra-

gon. A snake has one head. His monster snake would have many heads. A snake glitters, a snake can leap at times, so his monster snake would have large fantastic wings, would fly, could even light up and burn as the sun. Because of this newly acquired sense, a river which was to man like to all other animals just water to quench his thirst, began to radiate with form and color, with movement.

Man in his apocalyptic state beheld the river as a friendly snake. Thus the river became not only a physical necessity but also a legend, a symbol. And so the river came to render a new service, to satisfy the human hunger for beautifying and widening his world, to fertilize his mind.

With time all things became food for legend. In an ordinary deer, lion or ox, man began to see peaceful or fiery monster deer, monster lions and oxen, rumping about earth or sky. All this made man think, helped him organize his thoughts towards new and ever newer world conceptions.

Art had thus become and forever remained the superfine ethereal element which controls and dominates our world.

Men had gone far ahead from that primitive state, but the prehistoric apocalyptic eruption still influences creative personalities from time to time. Such was the case with Goya, Blake, Rousseau, and is also with Benjamin Kopman.

At first thought, it may seem as though these personalities do not belong to our time, that they live in some uncultured prehistoric age. But on the contrary, there is much art culture in the raw urge of man of to-day who breaks away from accepted methods and who lets objects, man and animal sway before his fancy in primitive form.

In Kopman's work one feels a brutal yearning for form, a diabolical force animates, vibrates from under his hand. This is a specific, artistic energy that seeks

to create life from all lines, straight, round and broken. Hence the unexpected and electrifying gleam in some of the faces of his figures, the revelations of almost unseen, new begotten animals and people; often a mixture of animal and man. All this, as stated above, is done by Kopman quite brutal. But just this gives his canvasses a particular aspect and force; carries with it a glowing breath, the breath of Genesis.

Kopman came to tell of a great grotesque world. Often it is almost a hallucination, but the vision is nevertheless one of grandeur and of a fine embrace. Kopman's work makes you think at times that as soon as he took his palette and brush and approached the canvas, he immediately beheld in the shadows of the canvas surprising forms and shapes (like one at times beholds figures in the clouds), and Kopman hastily rushed after these moving shapes and painted them in their crawling, brooding movements before they vanished. (See picture "Animals.") Or take his canvas "The Dead Rider"; an upturned head of a becalmed man resting in the corner of the canvas; above—the head of a horse, a couple of animals (of Kopman's make), a few leaves, a few rocks, the trunk of a tree. This all, forms upon forms, to tell of death and life.

At times, speed overwhelms this painter. His eagerness to grasp and cage his vision before it vanishes makes his picture look a bit hasty—something that should never show in a work of art no matter how quickly it is done. But usually there is that fine calm and lucid flight of vision that dominates his canvasses. Take, for instance, his picture of a man and some other creatures hovering above, a mysterious lion placed beneath at the mouth of a cave, lying majestically like a foundation to all—to man, earth and heaven. This canvas, large in size and design, emanates a quiet, great pathos. And his canvas of a woman, like a falling star, with a moonlight

glare and beaming blue about her—above her, and her radiance some sort of a bear climbing a tree. And take his quietly conceived "landscape" drawn with large simple movements, the colors of which are moodfully meditated and achieved.

In painting it is after all not only the convincing form attainments, but mainly the convincing color movement and relation which bring joy, stimulate and carry our vision—and thought.

Kopman is biblical and prophetically blunt and pure, not only in his vision but also in his feeling and thought. This makes his work so genuine, so devoid of cleverness. Had he only wanted to show here and there a slight suggestion that he is wiser than the things he paints, or the method he employs, his canvasses would have turned to posters or mere decorations. A pure Godly eye keeps watch over him. In full earnest has God created his world and men come and stand before him in full earnest.

Optimistic natures have an urge for play, for pure and simple childish play. This would lead the artist to primitive and bizzare form and color, and could account for a considerable part of Kopman's work. Take for instance his "Circus," childishly playful and childishly imaginative; or his drawing of a full-sized man with a funny little hat on his head and a tiny little wee house right near him, or his bear reading a book.

But when creative man plays even as a child, man's mature earnestness plays at it, becomes an inseparable part of the game, and look—it is no longer mere play—it is play, it is drama, it is mystery.

Kopman does also sculpture from time to time. One can find traces of the sculptor in a good many of his canvasses. When he sculpts, it is sculpture pure and simple with that same Kopmanesque elemental primitiveness.

Kopman also writes from time to time and also this inclination can be seen in some of his paintings. As a matter of fact, I think some of his paintings have a cabalistic embrace; undeciphered to us, but deeply felt and known to their master. (See his painting "composition.")

Not that I approve of literature in plastic art, but I assert, an artist must always ask himself consciously or unconsciously:

What am I? What is my real self when naked, when void of all that the street can see?

And when this was honestly done, he may break all the rules, he may work against all our conceptions, and there is nothing left for us than say—"Blest is the honest trodder on His roads."

Kopman reveals to us what his Creator and his race have given him. He does it with profound purity, with the innocence of one who has just raised his head above the mist, and who enjoys the lift and meditates over the mist beneath.

What is Art? It is our spiritual self rising above our physical being.



II

Mr. Henry McBride, in my estimation, the finest art critic in America, who earnestly loves art and who is genuinely happy over each newly discovered artist, says in his review of the last salon exhibition:

"It remains reasonably certain as Duncan Phillips has said, that in spite of all of our endeavors in this direction there will be geniuses to die in garrets, just as they have always done. The Salons and the Independents, however, minimize this danger.

"A case in point is that of Benjamin Kopman, who is not represented in the Phillips Memorial Gallery nor in the 'Hundred Important Paintings' show, yet who unquestionably has much of the stuff of a genuine painter, and whose hard times may later on be considered a reproach to us."

The esteemed Mr. McBride, who loves America with open eyes, as honestly as he loves art, is pained that America, being so deeply engrossed in materialism, has so little regard for real art. (See also his notes on Gaston Lachaise, etc.)

There are two kinds of people who speak nowadays about materialism. One who suffers because of it, and the other victoriously announcing to the people that materialism is the only truth; that our lives are and should be controlled and dominated by it. This constant rumpus about materialism brings apathy, brings dejection and loneliness to our creative men. But I say, this dejection and loneliness is sinful. Even though it is true that the material element is a great factor, yet our lives are in truth controlled and dominated by the most ethereal and superfine elements, by the arts.

The fact that man has torn himself from his pre-historic state, from his animal state and became a human being, is proof that our existence is being dominated by the finer element in us.

The world produces, yields, and exists in honor of its creative spirits.

Let all creative men and all those who aim to beautify and better the ethical and artistic conception of their generation and their people light up the great torch that creative men of past generations had lit.—Rabbi Simon Ben Jochai said to his son Rabbi Eleazar, "Do not curse the world. The world is good if it has such men as you and myself in its midst."

And he also said, "Since the day of my birth up to this very day the world has been forgiven all its sins because I was born. And when my son, Eleazar, is

also here, all the sins of the world from its beginning until to-day are forgiven. And if Jotham Ben Uzziah is also with us, then the wrong of the world from the first day of its creation until the last days of its existence is forgiven."

And I would add of my own accord words Rabbi Simon Ben Jochai could have said:

And for all those people who do not know this solemn truth, I know it for them. Even as the two hundred and forty-eight parts of my body are united and serve the purpose of radiating my thoughts, and even as through my eyes and through my mouth all the parts of my body see and speak, so does the world see and speak through me, through my son, through the Jothams and Jonathans. We are the eyes of the world. A flame, a light exhales from us, and should a black bird attempt to fly over the heads of men it would burn and perish.



III

Kopman is a creative personality and I tried to speak of him only as an artist, without alluding to his Jewishness. I would nevertheless make the following general statement:

Two may look at one and the same tree. Both may be moved to say "How beautiful is the tree! and yet the two may be miles apart in the quality and in the sum total of their emotions; as though they were not at all seeing the same tree, as though they were not at all saying the same words. To one of them the tree, although beautiful, has its limitations, his vision being satisfied and exhausted with the tree's external beauty—whereas to the other, the tree as

it is in its full exterior splendor, is only a threshold that invites, that tells of possible new forms, revelations, worlds, spheres.

The Jew has taken to art—the sentence “How beautiful is the tree” could suddenly turn to be something entirely different from the fine, correct but cold Grecian conception. The inherent Jewish spirituality, great because of great religious experiences has turned to the various arts. The Modiglianis, the Epsteinis, the Ravels, the Wassermans, the Rhineharts are not the only ones who came to affix their seal on the arts of the world. The psychology of the world may with time change and assume a new aspect since, as above stated, the world is being controlled and dominated by its finer element, by its creativeness, by its art. And to place a seal on the arts of the world means affixing a seal on the psychology of the world.





Composition



The Lion



A Sailor — Owned by Sydney Janowitz



A Courtesan



Old Barns



A Girl



Etching



Landscape With Bridge



Composition — Owned by Alfred Stieglitz



A Bear — Owned by Alfred Stieglitz



Animals



A Girl



Landscape



Portrait



Circus — Owned by Bernard Reis



A Girl — Owned by J. B. Neuman

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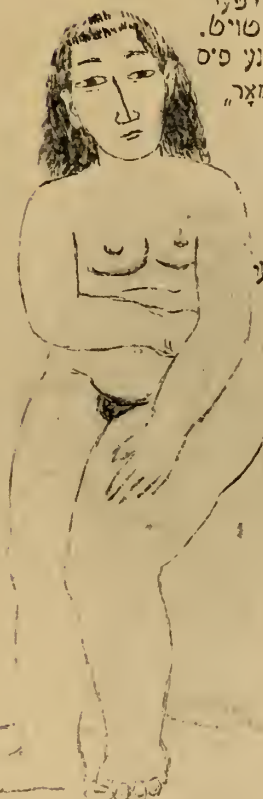
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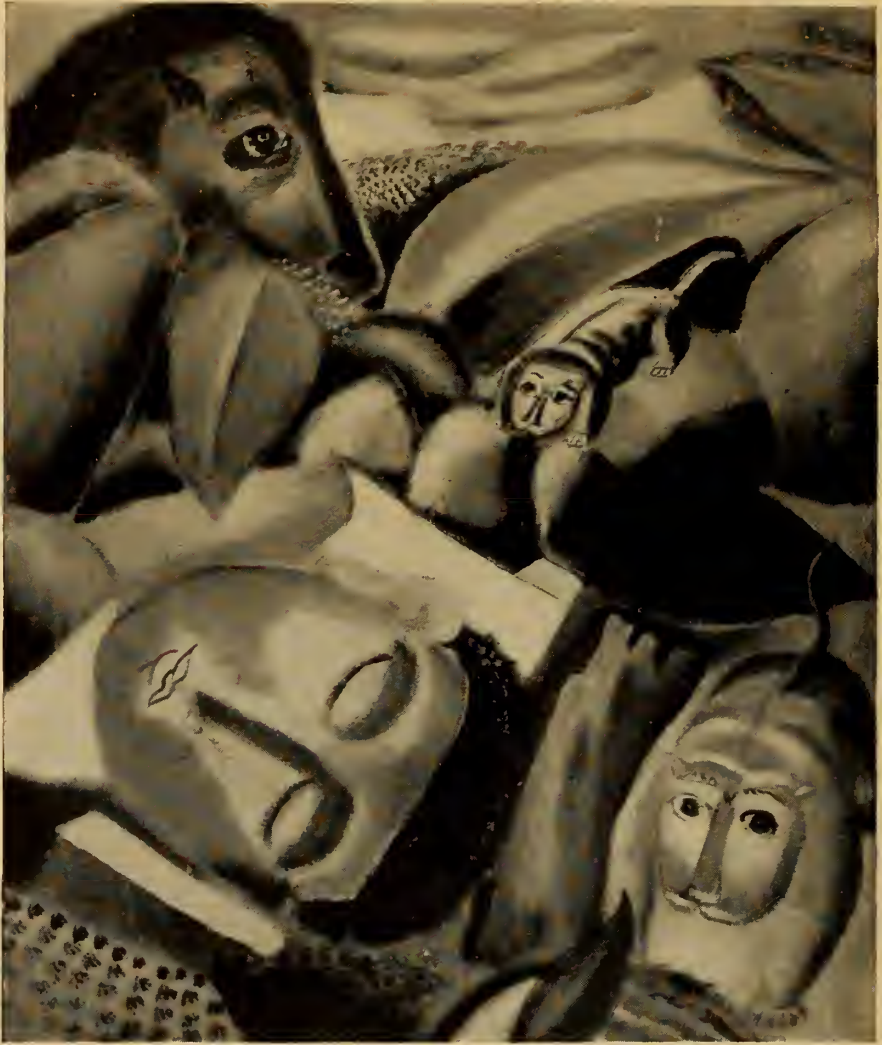
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Korman



A Dead Rider



Circus Woman Dressing



Landscape



Portrait



Circus



Flying Girl



Landscape — Owned by Mrs. B. Goldsmith

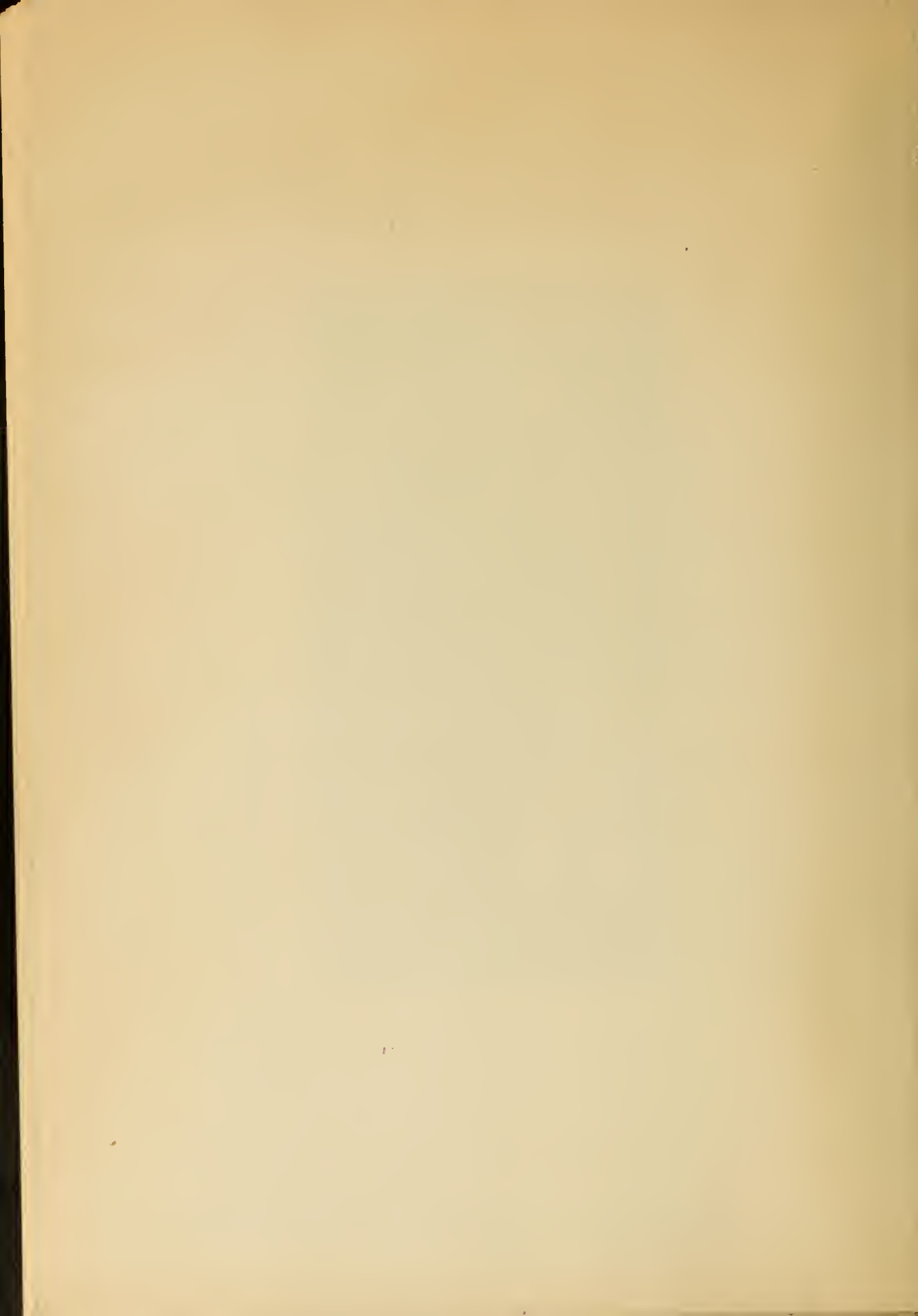


The Clown



Landscape — Owned by Mrs. Jane Rogers

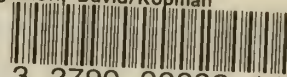




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